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THE LETTER OF CONSOLATION OF MAIMUN BEN JOSEPH.

It was, I think, Abraham Mendelssohn who said that, up to a certain period of his life, he was the son of his father, but afterwards he was the father of his son. The latter part of this happy remark might be applied, but with far less justice, to the subject of this paper. All who have any pretence to a knowledge of Hebrew literature know something about Maimonides, or more correctly Maimunides, but few have heard of his father. And yet his father deserves a niche in the history of his age and of Judaism. The letter, of which I publish the Arabic text¹ and an English translation, bears evidence to his simple faith, to the warmth of his affections, to his enthusiasm, and his confidence in the future of Israel, and of Israel's religion.

Of the life of Maimun² ben Joseph, we know but little. His name is Arabic, and is derived from the verb *Yamana*, and means Felix, Benedictus, a translation, perhaps, of the Hebrew *Baruch*. We must remember this when we meet with the name Maimun. It is not an unusual name, and several persons have borne it. Azariah de Rossi³ speaks of a Maimun, the author of a commentary on the Astronomy of Alfergani, but Steinschneider has shown that the author of this commentary was a certain Maimun of Montpellier.⁴ I think I may say of our Maimun that he was a pupil of Joseph Hallevi Ibn Migash. His grandson, Abraham ben Moses Maimonides tells us this in his *Kitab Alkifayah*.⁵ Ibn Migash was head of the school at Lucena, and his pupil followed in his footsteps, for we find that he bore the title of *Dayan*, a title probably equivalent to *Ab beth-Din*.

¹ The Text and Appendix will appear in No. 6.

² Should be spelt with *u* in last syllable, not *o*.

³ מאור עינים (ed. Cassel), page 331.

⁴ *Hamazcir*, 1879, p. 110.

⁵ Steinschneider Catalogue of Bodleian Coll., 1865, p. 55. Dr. D. Joel, in his *Aberglaube und die Stellung des Judenthums zu demselben*, ii. 63, throws some doubt as to the relations which existed between Ibn Migash and Maimun.

That he was learned in Talmudical literature may be proved from the number of times he is quoted by his illustrious son.¹ He wrote a commentary on the Pentateuch in Arabic, fragments of which are known to us from the commentary of his grandson on Genesis and Exodus, which fragments we publish in the Appendix. I trust that, perhaps, the publication of these fragments may be the means of unearthing the commentary itself. Some of the comments are very beautiful. Noticeable, for instance, is Maimun's remark upon the prayer of Jacob, that his grandchildren might be called by the name of his fathers. "So long as they deal righteously," Maimun says, "they will be worthy to bear the name of their ancestors; if they sin they will be called the princes of Sodom and Gomorrah."² We know, too, that he wrote in Arabic commentaries on the Dinim, concerning the ritual and the festivals.³

But his greatest work, because it is still complete, is the letter which he composed for his co-religionists who were suffering from the persecution of the "Unitarians" in Fez. Geiger was of opinion that this letter was identical with the Iggereth Hashemad which is generally attributed to Maimonides, and the opinion was supported by some words of Saadiah ben Maimun ibn Danan.⁴ Graetz was distinctly of opinion that such an identification was impossible, basing his conclusion on the Hebrew marginal notes which are appended to the letter, and the Hebrew verses which are quoted in it.⁵ And Graetz's view was undoubtedly correct. There is not the slightest likeness in substance or in the manner of treatment between the "Letter of Consolation," by the father, and the

¹ Introduction to Commentary on *Mishna* :

Bechoroth, viii. 7.

Eduyoth, iv. 7.

Eduyoth, i. 3.

Shevuoth, vi. 7, a valuable passage, proving that Joseph Hallevi was the teacher of Maimun.

Yad Hachazakah Hilchoth Shechita xi. 10, an interesting passage.

² Steinschneider refers (in his commentary on *Hamaceir*, vi. 1863, p. 114) to the fact of Maimun being quoted by his grandson. The passages commented on by Maimun, which, as we have said, are given in the Appendix, are the following: A long commentary in his own words on portions of Exodus xxxii. and xxxiii.; Genesis xxi. 16, 30, xxiii. 2, xxvi. 3, xxxiii. 17, xxxiv. 7, xxxv. 4, xxxviii. (the dream of Joseph, and his being sold to the Midianites), xli. 25, 34, xlii. 13, 22, xlviii. 16, xlix. 16, l. 2; Exodus iv. 16, xiv. 8, xix. 22, xx. 24, xxi. 29, xxiii. 14, xxiv. 14, xxviii. 13, xxviii. 28, xxx. 7.

³ Azulai Shem Haggadolim s. v. Maimun. Responsa Simeon Duran, I. 2.

⁴ Geiger, *Moses ben Maimun*, Anmerkung 17.

⁵ Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, Vol. vi., 2nd edition, 293; Edelmann *Chemda Genuzah*, Introduction lxxxiv.

"Letter of Apostasy," which is assigned to the son. Nay more, there is no comparison possible between the minds of the father and son. The son was not unemotional, but he was a philosopher first of all. The father is all enthusiasm, full of faith, longing to dwell in the beautiful stories of Hagadah, not afraid of believing in angels, not desirous of making God an abstraction, or the apostle of God merely a deep thinker. We have been taught to appreciate the great religious revival in Islam which was brought about by the Almuwahhidun or the strict Unitarians, and for this better appreciation we must be grateful for the work done by Prof. Goldziher of Vienna in publishing the Paris MS. of the Mahdi Book of Ibn Tumart. But though the Unitarians brought about a great religious reform, yet the fanaticism, which is almost inseparable from any deep religious feeling, caused much misery to non-Moslems who were dwelling in Moslem states. "In our country," said boastingly a great historian of the time, "there is no church and there is no synagogue." Maimun endeavoured to strengthen the faith of those who were wavering, and he sent an open letter to one of his brethren in the year 1160. In that year Maimun and his son Moses were in the "land of the West," and it is to the inhabitants of Fez that his letter applies.¹ In the year 1165 they left Africa for Palestine, and arrived on Sunday, May 16th, at St. Jean d'Acre. There they met Jepheth ben Elijah, whom Benjamin of Tudela visited before the year 1173. Jepheth seems to have accompanied them to Jerusalem, where they arrived on October 12th, 1165. Jepheth ben Elijah returned to Acre, and Maimonides journeyed to Egypt. Whether Maimun accompanied him thither or remained in the Holy Land is doubtful. Geiger has published the letter which Maimonides wrote to Jepheth ben Elijah, the Dayan, in which he speaks of his father's death, but we cannot glean from it where he died. All Maimonides says is this: "After we had parted a few months, my father died, and letters of consolation came to me from the extreme ends of the Magreb, even from Christian Spain, but thou didst give no heed." If we might make history, instead of telling the simple truth of history, we should let him die in the land to which he hoped that one day all nations would flow, believing in God and in God's apostle.

I think I have now recounted all his works known to us. He may have written a commentary on the book of Esther. There is a reference to a comment on a verse in Esther in a Yemen Arabic manuscript referred to by Steinschneider;² but

¹ Geiger, *Moses ben Maimun*, 20.

² *Hamazcir*, 1880, 63.

his reputation must be based upon his letter. There is little need for me to give an abstract of it, as I have translated it in full; but I cannot refrain from praising its simple style. There are parts where the reader who is but slightly acquainted with the beauties of the Arabic language, as the present translator, is carried away by it. He writes in parts as Jehudah Hallevi might have written. It has sometimes been asked why, if Maimonides wrote the Iggereth Hasshemad, did he not refer to his father's work? The answer is that he could not. The objects aimed at by the two letters were different. Perhaps the difference lay deeper still, as the father, to use the words of Maimonides, was one of those who forbade, while the son was one of those who permitted.¹ I do not think that I should be wrong in asserting that, at any rate, when the Letter of Consolation was written, Maimun had no intention of embracing Islam, even in appearance.

One point is striking in the reading of the letter: it is the very strong influence which Moslem phrases exercised upon Jewish theology. Maimun's perpetual insisting upon belief in God and his Apostle, and in that with which he was sent down, seems almost like an echo from the *Qur'an*. Abraham is called without hesitation the Mahdi of God, and perhaps the great stress which is laid upon the greatness of Moses may be intended as a set off to the greatness of Mohammed. At least this is clear, that there is much greater affinity theologically between the parent and the younger daughter religion than between the parent and its elder daughter. Imagine a Jew in Russia writing to his persecuted brethren and using terms identical with those of Christian theology.

Possibly the portion of the letter which will prove most interesting to some readers is the commentary on the 90th Psalm, with which the letter concludes. It will be interesting to find how this Psalm was applied, not so much to the shortness of life as to the shortness of God's anger, and the ultimate deliverance from captivity. This Psalm apparently possessed great attractions for those who suffered calamities in the days of persecution. We are told that Judah Hadassi, the Karaite, wrote a commentary on it, which reminds the reader very strongly of the commentary of Maimun.

Goldberg translated a great portion of the text into Hebrew,² but I trust that the letter in its English dress will be, to use the words of its author, "a source of consolation and of comfort" to those who are inclined to waver in faith, or

¹ *Hilchoth Schechita*, *ad loc. cit.*

² *Lebanon*, 1872.

to yield to difficulties; and that something may have been done to place before the reader a man who has been almost unknown, but who was more than the mere father of his son.

I cannot conclude without expressing my sincere thanks for the valuable assistance I have received from the distinguished editor of the *Book of Roots*, and of the Catalogue of Hebrew MSS. at the Bodleian, Dr. Neubauer; from Mr. S. Schechter, whose wonderful knowledge of the whole field of Rabbinical literature has been at my disposal; and to Mr. Shâker Geohany, of Mount Lebanon, from whom I have received invaluable aid in the editing of the Arabic text.

L. M. SIMMONS.

MAIMUN'S LETTER.—ENGLISH TRANSLATION.

In the name of the Lord, the God of the Universe, the letter of our teacher and our master, Maimun, the son of our teacher and our master, Joseph (the memory of the righteous for a blessing), which he composed in the town of Fez, in the year 1471, of the Seleucid Era. The author sent this letter to one of his brethren, that it might be a source of consolation for himself, and of delight to many souls perplexed on account of the sorrows of captivity, and grieved by the delay in the fulfilment of divine promises, and by hopes long cherished being deferred, for day succeeded night, and night day, and still they were slain for their obedience to God, and for the fulfilment of his will. But the multitude of our troubles gives us hope that God will grant us that which he has bestowed upon us, and makes us expect the fulfilment of that which he has promised us. Surely the words which God has spoken in his own name are true (Isaiah xlv. 23), "By myself have I sworn," and there is no oath greater than my name, my memorial assures redemption. And the words which I speak are words from which there is no return, since I am exalted above return and beginning, for unto me bend the knees of all creatures, by me do all tongues swear in purity, and nought is sworn by me unless it is done; how much more will the promise be fulfilled which is sworn by myself, and which I swear to fulfil myself!

(*End of Introduction.*)

The author of the letter writes as follows:—

May God lead thee in the way he desires, and remove thee from that which he abhors. May he direct thee in the straight

path, and may he make the angels of his people an assistance for thee, assisting thee to do that which he desires, and which the law demands of thee in accordance with that which he has promised his saints by the hands of his prophets. "The Lord is good and upright, and therefore he shows sinners the way." (Psalm xxv. 8).

Know then that it is clear and distinct through that which is proved from the writings of the prophets and the comments of the rabbis, that God is true, that the messages which he has sent to us are true, and that which generation after generation has handed down to us is true. In these there is no doubt, no defect, no lie, no deception. God knoweth that which exists before it came into existence, and all events pre-exist in his knowledge. He does not desire a thing and then change it; he does not favour and then reject. It is only man, from whom the knowledge of the future is hidden, who desires a thing, and then when something happens which he did not anticipate, his desire is changed. But how can he, whose knowledge of every event precedes the happening of that event, and who establishes every event in accordance with his will, how can he wish a thing and then change it? how can he first distinguish a people and then reject them? This is impossible for God, and so God spake to one who asserted its possibility, "God is not a man that he should lie" (Numbers xxiii. 19). And Samuel also said, "The strength of Israel will not lie" (1 Samuel xv. 29). And now that we have seen that God chose a people, and distinguished them, and inclined to them, and showed to them his favour, and drew near to them in a manner that he drew near to none of his creatures before or afterwards, we know that God's knowledge of his people preceded his choice, and that he knew that they would have faith, and stand firm to his commandments in the beginning and at the end. I mean to say that all the events which happened between the beginning and the end (God's choice of us, and his receiving us back into his favour) are unessential, without stability, and without permanence. We may compare the life of Israel to the life of a healthy man. At first he was young, and advanced from one thing to another; then he arrived at middle age, and remained for a long time in the best condition; then diseases came upon him and maladies, and his health is undone, and his visage is marred, and it is as if he had never been healthy at all, and it is almost as if nought were left to him of his former appearance, for all is changed, and he is left for a time despaired of, until his condition improves, and the body begins to recover perceptibly; it heals little by little, he returns to his health, and it is as if he had never been sick at all. So God knew beforehand Israel's firmness in obedience, and that they would turn neither to the right hand nor to the left, as it is said, "And all the people answered with one voice" (Exodus xxiv. 3, 7), and God knew

that the children of Israel would remain faithful even at the end of time, therefore he emphatically pronounced, "And also in thee they will believe" (Exodus xix 9). And God describes the corruption of our condition between these two periods in the words, "And it shall come to pass if thou wilt not hearken" (Deut. xxviii. 15), and threatens Israel with every possible calamity and misfortune; but he declares at the end that, in spite of their corruption and of his punishing them, he would not hate them, or cast them off, and that God's anger was but a chastisement and a punishment for disobedience, for scripture calls calamities corrections in the well-known verse, "As a man chastises his son" (Deut. viii. 5). Here the apostle says, Understand ye, and be firm, and know that God's punishment of you is not like his punishment of the nations, but the distinction between them and you is clear, in that the punishment of a rebel, who is a stranger to us, is not the same as the punishment of a child. For when a stranger is rebellious against us, we cause a heavy punishment to descend upon him, we are incensed against him, we desire to root him out; but when a child is rebellious against us, we punish him in a gentle way, giving him instruction, inflicting pain upon him, the effect of which, however, will not be permanent, with a thong which gives pain, but leaves no trace, and not with a whip, which leaves a permanent mark, but with a rod, which indeed makes a mark for the time, but cleaves not the flesh, as it is said, "If thou beatest him with a rod, he shall not die" (Proverbs xxiii. 13). And it is said of him who was beloved by God above all his other creatures that when he was rebellious, he corrected him with a gentle punishment, or with such a trial as man could impose, which is no trial, as it is said, "If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men" (2 Sam. vii. 14). And God, the exalted One, proclaimed in this sense to his first apostle, and said, "And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them to destroy them utterly" (Leviticus xxvi. 44), and he also said, through those who came after the first apostle, "Though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee, but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished" (Jeremiah xxx. 11), and if God had desired to hate us when we rebelled against him, he would have cast us off altogether, or have left some mark upon us as our enemies assert; and if what they assert were true, they would have been presented with that which has been given to us, and they would have had assigned to them the position which was assigned to us. Dost thou not understand that when a king is angry with one of his favourites, he changes him for a second, rends his garment, and gives his decorations to his successor, and places his successor in the same position with respect to himself as he

occupied? And when a husband is angry with his wife, he changes her for a second, and gives the second one the position which had been occupied by the first, as it is said, "And he placed the crown of the kingdom on her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti" (Esther ii. 17)? And where is the religion over which God has placed the protection of his clouds, placing his Shechina in the midst of its followers, apparent to all beholders, according to his word in the law, "And the glory of the Lord filled the sanctuary" (Exodus xl. 34). And so in several other passages, "For the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord." And what prophet is there like the greatest of the prophets? and what clear signs, and miracles, and wonders, and supernatural appearances like those shown to us? And also if God had brought them near to him, and had revealed to them our law, it would perchance have been said that God had changed us for an obedient people, in that we were disobedient. But our law is not like their law, desiring to-day that which it did not desire yesterday, and loving to-day those whom it hated yesterday. And if God had left us in dispersion, promising, threatening, and saying nought beyond (the promise holding good so long as we did his will, the threat being fulfilled when we disobeyed it), and uttering no explanation, even the restoration would have been possible, for God has a beneficent intention, which is proved by his not having changed us for another people, nor did he bestow on them any of our gifts. And he could not do so when he filled his book with many clear promises of what he would do for us after our misfortunes, using first the words, "If ye will not hearken," but afterwards, "Ye will surely hearken." The first prophet referred to all this in language brief, concise, and comprehensive, when he said, "(At the end of days) thou shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice. . . . then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will gather thee from all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost part of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee. And the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it, and he will do thee good, and will multiply thee above thy fathers. . . . For the Lord will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers" (Deut. xxx. 3).

These verses can best be explained by the commentaries of later prophets, by such explanations as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, the twelve minor prophets, and Daniel, who was the seal of all the prophets, assigned to them, as well as by the promises which are contained in the Book of Psalms. All later promises are an interpretation of those which had been uttered by the first prophet. We may make our meaning clear

by the following illustration. A man speaks thus to his vizier, "Say to my subjects, The king will do you a favour, and will clothe you, and will honour you with positions of dignity." Then the king's vizier goes away, and in process of time other messengers arrive. Each new messenger speaks of the commands which his master had given him with reference to the promised favours, and tells his hearers that so and so many of them will partake of them. Then the souls of those who hear are refreshed, and filled with gladness. And again another messenger reports that there will be such and such a garment for every one who is present. But each new messenger describes how all these details were contained in the first declaration. Thus God sware by his holy name that he would confirm everything which those who had come from him had promised. And if there had been an earthly king who had promised and sworn to be faithful to his promises, those to whom the promises had been given would have rejoiced; but such a joy is illusive, and doubtful in two respects; first, the executing of the promise is assigned to another, and secondly, his own life is in the hand of another. If he live, he is often prevented from performing his promises through contingencies which had not been foreseen, or through unexpected obstacles; or death, as we have said, may cut him off, or even he to whom the promise has been made may not live to see its fulfilment. But the Creator, in his greatness, is independent of all events. In his way there is no difficulty. He is not subject to death, or to space, or time. How then shall he not pay that which he has promised even without an oath, and how much less when he has promised with an oath? Even an oath by the name of God compels one of his creatures to be faithful to his promise, as it is said, "He shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth" (Numbers xxx. 3), how much more must such an oath compel God himself? And if he had sworn by any of the things he has created, since all these things come to an end, and all these things are in his power, it would have been said that there was no oath, but he sware by his own name, which passes not away, and changes not, and this is the meaning of the words of God, "By myself I have sworn, saith the Lord" (Genesis xxii. 16). And the prophet said to God when he was angry, and wished to annihilate Israel for what they had done, "Remember Abraham-Isaac and Israel thy servants, to whom thou didst swear by thine own self" (Exodus xxxii. 13). And he said, referring to his promises to us, "I have sworn by myself; the word has gone out of my mouth" (Isaiah xlv. 23). And these are clear sentences, and self-evident truths, and enduring signs that God does not hate us, and that he will not cause to pass away from us the name of children, whether we please him, or anger him against us, whether we believe in him, or whether we turn away from him, in accordance with his words, "Ye are the

children of the Lord your God " (Deut. xiv. 1) ; " My son, my firstborn " (Exodus iv. 22) ; " Children in whom there is no faithfulness " (Deut. xxxii. 20) ; " Children that are corrupters " (Isaiah i. 4) ; " Sottish children " (Jeremiah iv. 22). And he promised to be gracious to us when he said, " It shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God " (Hosea ii. 1) ; " For I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born " (Jeremiah xxxi. 9), and many other promises of the same character. And it is necessary that we should rely upon God, and believe in him, and not doubt his promises, just as we do not doubt his existence, nor should we doubt whether he will cast us off when he has promised to draw us near unto him, nor should the glorious condition of the nations terrify us, or what they assert, or what they hope for, because we confide in God, and have faith in his promises. And in spite of their gaining supremacy over us, and their being angered against us, and their conquering us, and the variation of our calamities with the variation of day and night, (in the day we fear their dealing treacherously with us, and that which may happen to us in the course of the hours through their taking counsel against us, and we hope that we may be to-day in the same condition as we were yesterday when we slept at rest ; and we say with the lengthening of the day, " O that we could be at peace from them to-day as we were yesterday ; no misfortune has happened to us," and when the night comes, we say, " Who knows to-night what may happen to us ? O that this night could be like the day which has passed away," and it is this wherewith our prophet threatens us, " In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even, and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning " (Deut. xxviii. 67).), we must still reflect upon that which he has promised us, and upon that which we hope, and then the weary souls will have rest, and their fears be quietened, for there must needs be repose and healing after this unhappiness, there must needs be enlargement after this straitness.

And a man must strive his best secretly and publicly in whatever he has to perform of the law and obey of the commandments, whether those commands refer to the duties of the heart or to external duties, to lay hold of the cord of the law and not loosen his hand from it, for one in captivity is like one who is drowning. We are almost totally immersed, but we remain grasping something. Overwhelmed with humiliation, and contumely and contempt, the seas of captivity surround us, and we are submerged in its depths, and the waters reach our faces, and we are left in the worst condition, such a condition as David (peace with him) describes when he says, " Save me, O God ; for the waters are come in unto my soul " (Psalm lxix. 2). The waters are overwhelming me, but the cord of the ordinances of God and his law are suspended from heaven to earth, and whoever lays hold of it has hope, for in the

laying hold of this cord, the heart is strengthened, and is relieved from the fear of sinking to the pit and to destruction. And he who loosens his hand from the cord has no union with God, and God allows the abundant waters to prevail over him, and he dies. And according to the manner of his taking hold of the cord is his relief from the fear of drowning. He who clings to it with all his hand, has, doubtless, more hope than he who clings to it with part of it, and he who clings to it with the tips of his fingers has more hope than he who lets go of it altogether. So none are saved from the toils of captivity except by occupying themselves with the Law and its commentaries, by obeying it, and cleaving to it, and by meditating thereon continually, and by persevering therein day and night in accordance with the words of David in Psalm cxix. 92. In this verse David says, "If thy law had not been my comfort, and the desire of my soul, I should have perished in the days of my affliction." He foretold the state of Israel in captivity and their entanglement in its toils, and how, if they occupied themselves with the law and obeyed it, they would be saved and would escape from the snares of the enemies amongst whom they had been driven into captivity. It is necessary that a man's intentions should be perfect, that his heart should be sincere, having faith in God, that God is true, and that his promises to us are true, believing in the first apostle and in that wherewith he was sent to us, confessing that God is the Lord, and that the message of his apostle is true, saying with a perfect heart free from deceit, free from doubt, "Moses is true and his law is true." And man should not follow his animal nature, or allow his natural dispositions to prevail over his intellectual, so that he destroy his religion and his life hereafter, and be deceived by this unstable world. For it is the love of this life wherein man is tried with two trials, which are the cause of his being overcome. The first of these trials is the love of women, the second is the love of this world and its hopes and its aims, with a desire which prevails over all men, a desire through which we were created, a desire which pervades everything, and none other than the prophets and saints are proof against it. And the world is like a beautiful woman whose appearance is pretty, whose features are fine, whose garb is attractive, whose perfumes diffuse their odour, whose gait deceives the lookers on, whom all men regard with loving desire, whose speech is pleasant and sweet, whom men are entranced to hear, so that their hearts are inclined to her by her words, she spreads her nets in the highway, and lays her snares on the high road, hunting those who desire and covet her, beguiling them until they fall, they go to her, coveting her, and while she flees from them they still covet and follow her, and they do not know what is under them. They are like birds descending in

freedom, the snare is laid for them, the grain is spread, and now they turn from it, now they incline towards it, they descend to gather the grain and the snare catches them and they are entangled in it, they desire to be free, but they are no longer able to fly away. Solomon compares this world to a woman (Proverbs vii. 14), and he describes woman's deceitful ways towards those who incline to her (Proverbs vii. 23). Beware, therefore, of the deception of this world and of seeking after your own earthly desires.

And reflect upon the approach of death which comes between man and his desires, think of his departing from his place, and of his being cast away from his abode. Man is perpetually at unrest in the place where he ought to have rested, till he went forth from it, and till those who were near to him were removed, till those who were united with him were dispersed, and till he is left alone confined in his grave. Then he leaves everything which he has gained. Then he gives an account for every sin which he has committed, and the reckoning is made up, and he is doomed to punishment, punishment hidden from the eyes, not understood by men. But the prophets have made us understand it, and they who feared God have taught it us, and the saints have made us yearn for it, but the wicked give no thought to it.

And he who is careful, does not lay stress upon the events of this world. If all goes well with him he is not overwhelmed with joy, and if things do not go well with him he is not afflicted, for he is without understanding who desires this world with a desire which destroys his position with God. What health can there be for him who is not whole with his Master? What pleasure for him who is not warned by punishment? And what rest for him who has no continued existence in the world? And how can man hope for the attainment of his desires in a thing in which lies his own death; or how can he hope to attain them by pursuing ends which stand as a separation between himself and his Master?

And he who is cautious looks to his Master, and strives by means of union with God to be happy, cleaving to God, being contented in this world with a little, when it is difficult to attain much, at any rate being contented with a mere trifle. Should we however wish for plenty we should seek for it in the manner which God has impressed upon us, although the making of the limit is in our own heart. Therefore reflection and firmness are necessary, and that man should toil and strive for himself and not for anything else.

And one of the strongest means of union between man and his Creator is his being faithful to the obligation imposed upon him of praying three times every day, in the morning out of gratitude to God for sending the dawn, in the mid-day the time of the declining of the sun from the east to the west, and also at the end of the day. And of this we find traces since the

existence of day and night. And our Rabbis hand down traditions¹ concerning the first fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. that they used to offer up these three prayers. Our father Abraham (peace be with him) used to lay stress on the morning prayer. He watched for the coming out of the sun, and then placed himself before God, as it is said, "And Abraham got up early in the morning" (Genesis xix. 27). And Isaac laid stress on the afternoon prayer. He used to watch for the beginning of the seventh hour of the day in order to pray, as it is said, "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide" (Genesis xxiv. 63), and Jacob laid stress on the evening prayer when the stars appeared, as it is said "And he lighted on a certain place, and tarried there all night" (Genesis xxviii. 11). But still all of them offered up the three prayers, for although every good man performs all the commandments of God, there is still some one upon which he lays special stress; Abraham laid special stress on the morning prayer because he was the first of the true believers, and because it was he who as giver of light to the world, and Mahdi, was the means of bringing the dawn. And Isaac, the second of God's messengers, laid stress on the second prayer, and Jacob the third, on the third; and the pious of our faith never neglect the three prayers, and he who is good prays the three, or two, or one at least as it happens to him, but no one ever desists altogether from uttering prayer, and when David knew the excellence of prayer he described himself and those who like him were diligent in prayer, seldom neglecting it, as follows, "Evening and morning, and at noon-day will I complain" (Psalm lv. 18). And Daniel (peace be with him) describes his own laying stress on these three prayers, when he says "And he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed" (Daniel vi. 11), and he risked his life by praying when the Persians and the Medes prohibited all prayers on his account, hoping that he would fall, and he did fall, but God did not allow any harm to come to him. The King had given orders that none should pray for thirty days but that all should implore aid morning and evening from the King not from a god, and not from Allah, and Daniel risked his life and prayed in accordance with his wont. He was watched upon the roof, he was discovered, he was seized, and accused before the King, and it is understood that it was this which was aimed at by them, because Daniel was the King's Vizier, elevated above them all, and his rivals could find no other means of accusing him before the King except on grounds of his devotion to God. The attainment of the hopes of his rivals was painful to the King, and the Viziers (cursed be all of them) prevailed upon him to have Daniel thrown into a pit full of hungry lions, which the King had prepared for whomever he desired to punish with an evil death. And

¹ Talmud, *Berachoth* 26b.

Daniel was cast into the pit, and the King was grieved thereat, and Daniel spent the night therein, and a stone was placed at the mouth of the pit, and it was covered, and the King put his seal upon the place where it was closed. They said to the King—"Take care lest the stone be away to-night so that Daniel come forth from the pit, or that any one tamper with it." And when the time arrived for Daniel to go down into the pit, Gabriel (peace be upon him) came and sat with him and shut the mouths of the lions, and bound them so that they did not move from their places or their dens, and he sat with him comforting him so that he should not be afraid; and when the day dawned the King arose, for his slumber had fled from him all that night, and he did not break his fast, and no maiden came in unto him, and no jester, and he was covered with sadness; then he arose as soon as the morning came, and he went covered with grief to the pit, every one following him who met him, and when he drew near to the pit, he exclaimed in a voice full of sorrow, and said, "O Daniel, O servant of God, the living, the eternal God, tell thou me, has the God whom thou worshippest continually the power to deliver thee from the lions?" And Daniel answered him from the pit while it was still closed, and said, "My God sent an angel and closed the mouths of the lions, and they did not kill me as a reward for my deserving well at the hands of God. Moreover I have not disobeyed thy command, for had I been disobedient to thee I should not have found good favour in thy sight, for God has insisted upon obedience to the King and the limit of that which God imposes upon men towards the King is obedience, and as for worship that belongs to God and not to thee, and he who does not render to thee obedience, rebels against God and against thee, and he who does not worship thee obeys God, and commits no sin against thee, and on this account I was delivered."

And then Daniel was brought up from the pit in the presence of the whole cursed multitude and others who accompanied them, and his body was stripped, and it was seen to be pure and clean without a single wound on it, for his faith had freed him. Then said the King, "Let every one be taken who has spoken against him to me." Then they were all brought into his presence, they, their wives, their children, and they were seized and cast into the pit and not one of them reached the ground, but the lions opened their mouths, caught them and tore their limbs, and made an attack upon those who were at the top of the pit, and if it had not been for his firmness in prayer Daniel would not have risked his life; nor did prayer in his heart while he was sitting down in silence content him, but he prayed kneeling and prostrating himself according to custom, for the sake of shewing his obedience to God.

And when prayer was in this state the three later prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi (peace be with them), with a hundred and twenty elders, arranged for us a prayer, in which

the learned and the ignorant might be equal, the learned adding nothing to it, the unlearned omitting nothing from it, and this prayer is the "eighteen blessings"; but this prayer is arranged for those who are in a condition of safety, but as for times and places of danger, they also arranged a short prayer that men might not be left without prayer entirely, and they made a difference between this latter prayer and the "eighteen blessings." The latter prayer is to be prayed towards the Qibleh, while the worshipper is standing, or sitting if there be an excuse to do so; and with regard to the shorter prayer, it is to be prayed in places of danger, whether the worshipper is standing, sitting or walking, and towards any Qibleh, and this prayer may be uttered at any one of the fixed times; but should the worshipper arrive at a place of safety, having uttered the prayer three times, he need only repeat the evening prayer, not those of the morning or afternoon; and if he reaches a place of safety in time for afternoon prayer, he should say that prayer before saying the "eighteen blessings" of the morning service. And he who does not know the whole prayer should pray the abridged one at the appointed time, and not remain without prayer altogether, for those who do not join the practice of prayer and those who separate themselves from religion altogether are alike.

Moreover, he who stands up to pray without knowing what he says, does not pray at all. The only recognised prayer is that which our holy men composed, viz., the "eighteen blessings" for those who understand, or the abridged prayer for those who do not understand, or the still more abridged one. And he who is able should utter the abridged prayer in Hebrew, as follows, the whole first part "O Lord, open thou my lips," till the end of "And thou art holy," and the last three blessings in full, but the middle blessings abridged, after the following reading of our Rabbis: ¹ "Give us understanding, O Lord, to know thy ways, and mould our hearts to fear thee; pardon us, that we may be redeemed. Keep us far from disease, and grant us the bounteous fruits of the earth; gather our outcasts from the four corners of the earth; they that stray from thy wishes shall be judged, and over the wicked wilt thou stretch thy hand; the righteous shall rejoice in the building of thy city, and the establishing of thy temple, in the springing up of the house of David thy servant, and the reparation of the lamp of the son of Jesse thine anointed; and thou wilt hearken to our prayers; blessed (art thou) who hearest prayer."

This is sufficient in time of necessity as a substitute for "And thou graciously bestowest knowledge," and the following blessings, and it may be uttered by the worshipper whether

¹ *Berachoth*, 29a. Notice the reading in the accompanying text. Cf. Rabinowicz, *Variae Lectiones*, ad loc.; Maimon, *Tefillah*, III., 2.

standing or sitting, if there be an excuse to sit, but there is a still more abridged prayer for times of pressing danger in the well-known words of our Rabbis.¹ If we utter this prayer, we need not repeat either the first three or the last three blessings, and he who does not know it in Hebrew may pray it in Arabic, and such prayer is sufficient for him, because prayer is permissible in any language, especially if the contents of the prayer are those prescribed by our Rabbis, but translated into Arabic. But to pray in Arabic without regard to the ideas prescribed by our Rabbis is not permissible. For instance, it is not permissible to offer up instead of an obligatory prayer such a prayer as this, "O God, have mercy upon me, and grant me such and such a thing," even if the worshipper utters it after the manner of prayer, walking, lying down or sitting. And this is the context of the prayer of which we have already spoken as being permissible in times of danger, "O God, our God, and the God of our fathers, behold thou knowest that our desires are great, and our speech is scanty. May it be thy will, O God, to grant to each one of us our due necessities, and provide our bodies with sustenance, and accept our prayer, for it is thou who acceptest prayer. May thy great name be blessed." This is sufficient for him who is ignorant, so that he may not remain regularly without prayer. In the sight of God there is nought more powerful than prayer, for when the intention of a man is sincere, the heart pure, believing in God and his apostle, then his faith is sound, his belief correct, and he finds favour in the sight of God, and God averts from him misfortunes, and he obtains mercy from God, and consolation, and his end is assured him, and he escapes from the fire, and he is worthy of resurrection and the obtaining of a reward, and the beholding of divinely promised bliss. And this is true even if he were one who could not read and was ignorant. But for those who know and read the law, and occupy themselves with understanding its lessons, there are degrees and rewards. As he increases in goodness, his reward increases if, in addition to knowledge, there be religion and true faith in God. Dost thou know the dignity of him who was sent to thee, and of the message with which he was sent, for it is indeed great? For if thou knew but a portion of the majesty which God bestowed on him, and how he favoured him above all mankind, thy faith in him would be sound, and through thy faith in him thou wouldest be fair in the sight of God.

Moses was a prophet in whose creation there was the evidence of the strength of God, for God created him in the most beautiful form, as the Scriptures bear testimony,² "And she saw that he was a goodly child" (כִּי טוֹב הָיָה) (Exodus ii. 2). And the name of God is *good* (טוֹב), in accordance with his word, "The Lord is *good* to all" (Psalm cxlv. 9); "The Lord

¹ *Berachot*, 29b.

² *Sotah*, XIIa.

is *good* to them that wait for him" (טוב י לקוו) (Lamentations iii. 25); "Thou art *good*, and doest good" (Psalm cxix. 68). And the name of light is טוב, in accordance with the word, "I will make all my *goodness* (טובי) pass before thee" (Exodus xxxiii. 19); "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the *goodness* of the Lord" (Psalm xxvii. 13); "How great is thy goodness." And besides being created beautiful in form, the light of God was clear in his face from the very first, in accordance with God's words כי טוב הוא. Wherever he went, his light increased, till a great fire was kindled, and in the time that "the Lord passed by before him" (Exodus xxxiv. 6), the light of his face grew stronger than the light of the sun, but more brilliant than it, and it was impossible that the light of the sun should be like the light of his face, because the sun is created from a light which God created, whereas the light of the face of our master Moses was from the light of the glory of God, which is uncreated; and that light was so terrible that no man was bold enough to approach it, and would only look upon him when he veiled his face, and nought but a part of the inside of his eyelids could be seen. How magnificent were the eyes which gave forth a light which not Michael, or Gabriel, or the holy *chayoth* could look upon. Over the face of Moses God had caused to pass the light of his splendour, in accordance with the words of Scripture, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee."

Moses was a prophet whose body was purified till it became as the body of Michael and Gabriel, but stronger, for those were of light, not of flesh or of blood, or of sinew or matter; but this mortal man entered among thousands and tens of thousands of angels of fire, one of whom would have put the earth in flames, how much more all of them? And he entered amongst them in accordance with God's word (Psalm lxviii. 18).¹ The most exalted one revealed himself to Moses, accompanied by all these. He cleared his way amongst them, and ascended above them, and beheld the light of God in ways which if I were to describe even approximately no intellect could grasp. And to this God himself bears testimony in the words "And Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was" (Exodus xx. 21).

And the hands of Moses were pure, for they took hold of the throne of God's majesty, for the holy *chayoth* were unable to carry the throne till God placed a partition between their heads and the feet of the throne, as God bears testimony. "And over the head of the living creature there was the likeness of a firmament, like the colour of the terrible crystal And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne" (Ezekiel i. 22, 26). The explanation of these verses is as follows:—Ezekiel says, "After God

¹ Pesikta Rabbathi xx.

revealed himself to me during the time of slumber and showed me the throne of his majesty, I saw those who carried the throne which apparently carried him. But it was the throne which was carried through the power of God. He carried the throne, but the throne did not carry him. And I saw above their heads a sky of pure crystal, terrible and fearful, and above this the form of a throne shining like a sapphire, and above it was the indescribable light of his majesty." Now that which the carriers of the throne could not bear, the hands of Moses bore, because God elevated him above all creation, above the angels, and certainly above mankind. And this is also sufficient proof for thee of the sublime position of Moses, that when Moses placed his hands upon the head of Joshua, God caused instantly to pass into his brain such deep knowledge of the law that he understood in six months (from the time of the imposing of the hands of Moses on the head of Joshua till the time of the departure of Moses from life was six months) more than those who had learnt from him during the previous thirty-nine years and six months. God bears testimony to this when he says, "And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom" (Deut. xxxiv. 9). And light passed into the face of Joshua from the hands of Moses, whom God appointed in succession to Moses, as it is said, "And thou shalt put of thine honour upon him" (Numbers xxvii. 20). And the congregation of Israel obeyed him in accordance with his words, "And the children of Israel hearkened unto him" (Deut. xxxiv. 9). And Scripture bears witness to this when it says, "And they feared him as they feared Moses" (Joshua iv. 14).

The feet of Moses were pure, so that he was enabled to tread the clouds of sacred light, as God bears witness when he says, "And Moses entered into the midst of the cloud" (Exodus xxiv. 18).

The body of Moses was strong, inasmuch as he dwelt among the angels, and the light of God surrounded him forty days and forty nights, and in like manner he stood afterwards another forty days, interceding for us with light surrounding him, and the last of these forty days was the day of the Atonement fast,¹ that is the time described in Exodus xxiv. It was a great sight which Moses saw, for he saw that which it was impossible for an angel to see, much more for man to see, as God bears witness (Exodus xxxiii. 13), and also (Exodus xxxiv. 6), And the light of God passed over his face and God proclaimed to him, teaching him that he was the exalted one, and that there was no God beside him, that he was "gracious and compassionate," and the rest of the thirteen attributes by which the exalted one described himself, and which he included in this verse. And when

¹ Seder Olam vi.

Moses saw what he saw, he knelt down worshipping before God, as it is said, "And Moses hastened to prostrate himself" (Exodus xxxiv. 8). These are his attributes which are here related generally without each one being explained specially.

Moses was a prophet in whom was the strength of God. The stature of every ordinary human being is four cubits, measured in accordance with his arm, but the stature of Moses was ten cubits, as Scripture bears testimony when it says, "And he spread the tent over the tabernacle" (Exodus xl. 19), and the height of the sanctuary was ten cubits, as it is said, "Ten cubits shall be the length of a board"¹ (Exodus xxvi. 16).

Moses was a prophet physically powerful, because he was able to remain without food one hundred and twenty days. During the first forty days, the first two tables were revealed to him; during the second, he interceded with God that the destruction of the nation might be averted; and the last forty, he interceded that God might forgive those who were left of his people, and not take away his light from their midst, and God accepted his intercession.

If any one doubted the apostleship of Moses his life was consumed, and he perished while his body remained untouched, as it happened to the erring Korah and his two hundred and fifty followers, "And fire came forth from the Lord, and devoured the two hundred and fifty men" (Numbers xvi. 35). Whoever, too, called him a liar was burnt even in life, and he went down to the fire of Gehenna even in life. Such were the two cursed unbelievers Dathan and Abihu, their children, their wives and their followers, and all those who doubted him, their number amounting to two hundred and fifty, who sank down into the earth and were burnt. And those who were left of the fourteen thousand and seven hundred, who doubted, but not in the same manner as the others, died by the plague on the following day, because they had called those who perished "the people of the Lord" when they were not "the people of the Lord." Only those are the people of the Lord who have faith in Moses, and the Scripture describes this when it says "And all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured" (Numbers xvii. 6). And the plague came down upon them as it is said, "And behold the plague is begun" (Numbers xvii. 11). And Moses helped them at the right time by saying to Aaron: "God is angry with the congregation; go quickly, take the censer and put therein the fire of the altar, and put the incense which thou usest every day before God morning and evening; behold God has taught me that incense taketh away the plague, and the angel of death² has acquainted me with this, and said to me, 'When the incense descends into the censer I shall be

¹ *Sabbath* 92a.

² *Sabbath*, 89a.

driven away.' " Then Aaron made haste and did that which he was commanded. He stood between the living and the dead, while the angel stood up killing them in great numbers. Then Aaron said to the angel, "Turn thou backwards, that I may place my censer here." But the angel replied, "God has commanded me." Aaron answered, "But Moses commanded me, and the command of Moses is the command of God." Then the angel desisted, the censer was put down and the plague was stayed. And God said to him "The command of my apostle is my command," and it is said "And he stood between the dead and the living" (Numbers xvii. 13), and the number of those who perished amounted to fourteen thousand seven hundred, beside them that died in the matter of Korah. Consequently the apostleship of Moses was verified, and proof was established that the commands of Moses are from God, and that he who doubts Moses doubts God also. Those who sank down into the ground, cried from the bowels of the earth while they were descending "Moses is true and his Law is true," but their cry availed them nought. And if this had happened before the earth opened its mouth it would have availed them, for Moses foretold it, and threatened them with the greatness of God's punishment, but they withstood him obstinately and called him a liar. So Moses said "Know ye, children of Israel that if these people die the common death of all men, or if God judges them with the judgment of all men who die and are buried in the earth, whom God raises from the dead and judges, and causes those who deserve it to descend into the fire—if he does with these men after this manner and they die without your seeing anything extraordinary, then what they say is true, and I have not the authority of God for aught which I say to you, and what I say is an invention of my own as they assert; but if God creates a new thing which has not been before and will not be afterwards, and these men are judged before they die and before the hour of resurrection, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, and they descend alive to the fire of the earth, to the place appointed by God, fixed as the place of punishment, then ye may know the truth of my word, and that he who denies me does not deny me, but denies God who sent me, and he himself bore testimony to me that it was he who sent me, and spoke to me and ye heard, and it was ye who said to me, 'We believe in thee in all that which thou bringest to us'" and these thoughts are comprised in the words "If these men die the common death of all men . . . then the Lord hath not sent me" (Numbers xvi. 29). And Moses did not finish speaking before the earth which was under the erring multitude was opened, and all Israel had just removed their tents from the spot which seemed to whirl round with them because the apostle had said to them "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men" (Numbers xvi. 26), in accordance with that which had been commanded to him

(Numbers xvi. 24), and they did thus, and they got up from the Tabernacle of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and when they saw that they actually were in the jaws of the earth and that it was swallowing them gradually they cried out, but their cry did not avail them, just as confession will not avail on the day of reckoning, for God will cast down those who confess only then into a fire which burns everlastingly, for confession avails us only before calamity has happened to us, in accordance with the words of Solomon (peace be with him), "Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might" (Ecclesiastes ix. 10).

The explanation of this verse is as follows:—Solomon said, directing him whom God directs, 'All which thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might, striving to obey God, and repent at a time when repentance will avail, and work where work is possible, and render to thyself an account in whatever thou gainest or whatever thou lovest, and know that which thou needest to know and to understand before thou go down to Sheol to meet the punishment of thy sins, because thou meritest to go down thither. When thou art there thou wilt be able to attain naught wherewith to defend thyself, "for there is no work" (*ib.*); thou wilt be able to do no work there, nor wilt thou be able to reflect, or know, or understand when thou goest down into the earth, into Sheol whither descended all those who doubted or denied the best of creatures, the greatest of men, the noblest of apostles. Therefore awake, O thou who slumberest in the flood of thy desires, for thou art in this world as one who slumbers dreaming of things delightful to him, dreaming that he possesses and does whatever he fancies; but when he awakes he finds nothing of that which existed in his dreams, and so are the hopes of this world and the attaining of its desires. At the awakening of death and the hour of judgment thou wilt find naught of that which thou hast done in this world, and if its pleasures were permitted pleasures, they will all vanish and thou wilt find naught of that which thou didst treasure up. Pleasures are not good deeds that thou mayest find them; and if the pleasures which thou hast treasured up in this world are prohibited, thou wilt be doubly affected with the calamities they bring. First, thou wilt find naught, and secondly bitter anguish will overtake thee on account of these pleasures. The body which takes pleasure in secret in those things which God does not desire, is cast down into a burning fire in the darkness of hell, which is fashioned in accordance with the will of God. Therefore awaken before thy death, and repent before thou leavest this world, and mend in the time of youth that which remainest to thee of old age; and just as if thou loved him who loved thee not, and neglected a dwelling in which thou didst remain, and held possession of a dwelling which belonged not to thee, so thou lovest this world. For this world is hateful. It gnaws away thy life by

day and by night. When the day is passed thou rejoicest in the night in that which thou hast acquired for thyself, and when the night is passed thou rejoicest that thou art in possession of another day in this world, and all the days and nights we pass do but diminish our life and shorten its duration, and no man of intellect would give predominance to that state in which thou art, to that life which thou hast wasted. Thou art in this world like one who is called to a feast, and who knoweth for a certainty that he will under no circumstances spend the night there, but that when the day is finished he will leave. And the intelligent man is he who is able to enjoy the pleasures of eating and drinking, but still thinks about his departure and still turns to his own abode. He lives at ease, and gives himself at eventide no anxiety concerning that which exists; he finds in himself strength for the rising, and when the night cometh he arrives home in health, and is at rest. And he who is light-witted cares too much about the feast and gets intoxicated, and oversteps the bounds of moderation, and continues to enjoy himself, and when the night cometh he is expelled by force in an unseemly condition, and is thrown outside into the lowest place. He is not left where he was, nor does he ever reach his abode. Lo! how weak is such an intellect. Therefore in this world we must bear in mind whither we are tending and journeying, so that we are not deceived or beguiled by it in the manner in which we have been speaking. All that we have been saying refers to one who has been seeking lawful desires, striving to attain legitimate hopes, endeavouring not to waste his time in laziness; how much more must this be the case with one who expects to attain these things by disobedience, and by finding pleasure in idleness. Therefore let naught deceive thee, and no temptation seduce thee.'

Contemplate the prophet who was sent to thee, and that with which he was sent, and his position. And what was the aim of his message? that he might be an apostle to thee, and urge thee to obedience. And if the law which he promulgated had to be believed merely on account of his own greatness, which we have already described, it would still have been necessary to believe it; how much more must we believe it when that law contains the commands of the Creator and his ordinances. And gratitude and cleaving to God are necessary, on account of him who sent and him who was sent. And this love is a virtue; so let not him whom God brings near make himself afar off, and let not him to whom Moses is the apostle neglect himself; and in the greatness of the apostle thou mayest understand the dignity of him from whom he was sent. If thou art a great man, he sends unto thee a messenger like unto thee, and according to thy position with him who sends will be the position of the messenger. And none are greater in the sight of God than Israel, and he sent unto them an apostle like whom there is no other apostle, and owing to the greatness of God's

love for Israel he made him an intercessor between him and them ; but in spite of his position before God and his nearness to him, he was the gentlest and most humble of mankind, as the Scripture bears testimony, when it says of him in the name of God, "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men who were upon the face of the earth" (Numbers xii. 3). And Moses was more jealous for Israel than he was for himself, and he loathed his own life on their account, and he would willingly have been blotted out of the company of the just on their account, since he said, 'O God, O my Lord, they have sinned a great sin, but thy forgiveness is greater ; if their sin is pardonable forgive them, but if thou wilt not forgive and wilt cut me off, then cut me off in this world and the next. Is not the great pre-eminence to which I am to attain, only on their account ? And if they are to cease to exist, then blot me, I pray thee, out of thy divine "Book of Life," for I do not wish to be left alive after them'; so the Scriptures repeat his words "and if not, blot me out of thy book" (Exodus xxxii. 32). And God was filled with pity, with compassion, and with mercy, for the congregation.

And when the approach of death was announced to him, this did not terrify him, nor did he consider it a great calamity, but he devoted himself to his people and said to God, "Let me not die till thou appointest over them those who shall lead them, for I am jealous on their account, lest I should die and not know who shall be the leader to superintend their affairs." Then God said to him, "Appoint Joshua," and Moses appointed him, and he rejoiced thereat, for he knew his character, and he strengthened him and he presented him to the people, and began to charge him concerning them.

And when the song (Deut. xxxii.) was revealed to him, and in it there was made known all that would happen to Israel in the long captivity, as it is said, "They shall be burnt with hunger and devoured with burning heat" (Deut. xxxii. 24), and all that God had threatened, "The sword without, and terror within shall destroy" (Deut. xxxii. 25), he was deeply impressed, and when he saw that at that time there would be no one to intercede, no one to pray, no one who would be fit to pray, and that no man of learning would be left among them, and that all would be equal in their wickedness, he was troubled. It was as God had described their condition when he said, "And he saw that there was no man" (Isaiah lix. 16). The explanation of this verse is as follows : When he saw that there was no man amongst them who could avail to intercede for them, he was astonished ; and when he saw that there was no one to pray¹ for them he had mercy and assisted them. And God also said, When I shall see that there is no pious man amongst them, and there is no aid to be expected from these virtuous men, for they

¹ Double explanation of the verse.

have all perished, then they will be assisted. And when Moses knew their degraded condition, and it was said to him when he had recited his prophecy concerning Israel, "Go up to Mount Abarim and die there, then Moses (peace be with him) arose and prayed for all Israel who should be driven into captivity, and when he saw that there was no good man fit to bear the name "the man of God," he said (Psalm xc.) "The prayer of Moses, the man of God." He included in it a prayer for all the vicissitudes which should befall Israel from the beginning of the captivity till its end, and a hope that God would deal gently with them, and cause their punishment to descend in gentleness and not in wrath, and that he would not root us out, nor let us pass away from him, but that he would forgive us, and return to us even as he was in times gone by, and that he would gladden our hearts and give us patience to bear our calamities during the length of the captivity, and that he would repel from us the evil the nations would inflict upon us, and the evils of every persecutor, and that he would still the waves of the seas which surround us, for the nations among whom we are dispersed encompass us about. And he included in this prayer a reference to all which had been, and all which was to be during the existence of the world. If we consider attentively every verse of this prayer we shall find that all God's promises to us and all his prophecies are contained in it. And after God had accepted his intercession on our behalf he made every prophet who came after to prophesy the same prophecies, showing thereby that God had accepted his request, and he sent prophets to us telling us of those favours that Moses desired, and he promised that he would grant them. And this prayer refers to the greatest calamities, and it has been for us an assistance, a support and a refuge, a reliance upon which we could rely, a perfect protection, an impregnable fortress to which we could escape in the hour of sorrow, for we are like a lamb which erred, which went astray amongst the thickets, or which forgot the place of its pasture, or was lost in the forests. And in these thickets there were a lion, a wolf, and a leopard, and they were hungry and ravenous, and they came forth all of them and they saw this lamb without a shepherd of whom they need be afraid, and that it had no power to rise, much less to run. Then they pricked their ears, they gazed intently, they ground their teeth greedy to devour it, for they had resolved to attack it. So God compared Israel when he said "Israel is a scattered sheep, the lions have driven him away" (Jeremiah l. 17). And the intercession which the best of creatures interceded for us stood before God, therefore their limbs were fettered, their feet entangled, their mouths closed, and the attack against her was prevented.

One day one of the kings of Rome¹ (cursed be all of them

¹ *Midrash, Esther, x.*

except the distinguished Antoninus who lived in the days of Rabbi Jehudah the prince) said to Rabbi Joshua ben Chanan-yah, "How strange it is that a lamb sees lions and walks amongst them without fear, though without a shepherd to help it"; and the Rabbi said to him, "It is because of the strength of the unseen shepherd who fetters their limbs and breaks their teeth, and prevents them from attacking it, because David our prophet prayed and said, "Break their teeth in their mouth, O God" (Psalm lviii. 7). The explanation of this verse is as follows: "Behold, O Lord, thou seest the beasts of prey that attack Israel; break their teeth in their mouths, O God, and shatter the grinders of all the lions, O Lord." And God himself has said; "Their redeemer is strong, the Lord of Hosts is his name" (Jeremiah l. 34).

And I have for many years taken upon myself the duty of reading every day "The prayer of Moses, the man of God" (Psalm xc.) before the reading of the hundred blessings before the prayer *ברוך שמו*, thereby drawing near to God in the very words used by the best of creatures, and imploring a blessing from him in his very language, and uniting myself to God in the very prayers used by the best of those who were ever born. And I used to reflect why this prayer came to be inscribed in the Book of Psalms, and how it came to be handed down from generation to generation, even to the days of David, who gave it a place in the book of praise with the prophecies of the ten elders, some of whom were his predecessors, some his contemporaries—for instance, the sons of Korah, who lived in the time of Moses, and they were Asir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph, of whom our Rabbis have handed down that because they fled from the error of their fathers, and followed the righteous apostle, they were inspired, and made to speak. Hence it is said, A Psalm of the sons of Korah, and Heman, and Jeduthun, and Maschil, and Ethan, and Asaph, and others. And I did not know why this prayer should be taken from the remaining prayers of the apostle, and placed in the Book of Psalms even till our day. And I commented on the portion of Haazinu (Deut. xxxii.), in accordance with that which I found handed down by our Rabbis, that when Moses came to the words, "For the Lord shall judge his people" (Deut. xxxii. 36), then he uttered "The prayer of Moses, the man of God," in which occur the words, "Return, O Lord, how long yet" (Psalm xc. 13). Then I considered the whole of the Psalm, and its secret was made clear to me that Moses had uttered it for the time of captivity, and that David had placed it in the Book of Psalms, that it might be a source of comfort and consolation to the followers of our faith. Then I commented on the whole of the Psalm, through God's help and guidance, and I placed it in the volume of my composition, upon the portion Haazinu, with which our commentary on the Torah concluded. And I said at the end of this Psalm that there was no doubt that he

uttered it on the day of his death, and left it as a legacy to Israel, and I did not know this as a matter of fact, but only as a conjecture, but after a while, when I commented upon the portion וּזְמַת הַבְּרִכָּה (Deut. xxxiii., xxxiv.), I found this conjecture fully verified by the words of our Rabbis, for in Sifre,¹ at the end of the commentary on the Torah, they say eloquently that our master on the day of his death uttered this prayer, and afterwards blessed Israel, and that he said וּזְמַת הַבְּרִכָּה, with the conjunctive *wav*, because this *wav* signifies something preceding it, and that that which preceded was "The prayer of Moses, the man of God." Then I rejoiced greatly, because I was led to a true conjecture of that which was handed down by our Rabbis amongst other traditions, and I rejoiced also to find the contents of all this prayer in the declarations of the prophets, and I have commented on it in order that it may be a source of comfort to the souls which are desolate in the desolation of captivity, and it is also a source of contentment to weary hearts which are wasted by the intense fear of the nations, and a correction of knowledge, and a strengthening of faith to the pious, and the steadfast, and the repentant, and those who have trust, and those who grasp the strong cord which unites them to God through their faith in our honoured apostle, elected above all mankind.

And the following is a commentary on the well-constructed words of his prayer, peace be upon him and upon the Rabbis who received the traditions from the prophets, and they in their turn from their master and the master of all mankind, peace be upon him. How nobly did he speak when he stood and offered this prayer for us.

"A prayer of Moses the *man of God*." The man distinguished by God. God has in this world no other since him. And every prophet, great in his own age, who arose after Moses and resembled him in possessing one or more of his characteristics was called, "The man of God," and they were ten, the first of them was the master of all mankind, and the last of them was Elijah, and these are they: Moses, Elkanah, Samuel, David, Shemaiah, Iddo, Elisha, Micah, Amoz, Elijah.²

O Lord thou hast been our refuge. O God, our God, thou art our refuge to which we fly, generation after generation, because when we have been conquered and dispersed amongst our enemies, and when misfortune overtakes us, and there is no king to order our affairs, and no adviser to guide us, and no fortress in which we can be intrenched, and no place of safety whither we can flee, and no army wherewith we may be protected, and no provision and no power even to speak, for we are deprived of every resource, the victories of our enemies and our inability to answer them have made us

¹ *Sifre*, Friedman, 342.

² *Sifre*, *ibidem*.

dumb. We are silent as if we were speechless. We are unable to open our mouths. And so David describes us (Psalm xxxviii. 14), "I am as if I were deaf, that I could not hear," etc. And when all resources are cut off and all our hopes are frustrated, there is no protection but with thee. We call and thou assistest; we cry and thou answerest, for thou art our refuge, as it is said, "O Lord, thou hast been our refuge."

And here Moses describes the reasons why God accepts our prayers and answers them. These reasons are repentance, obedience and confession to God, and if we possess these merits he assists us. And when God knew that we should sin, and that we should be overcome by the inclination to evil which was to be created in man, he ordained, even before he created man, amongst the seven things to be brought into being before the creation of the world, that repentance should be accepted.¹ The first of these seven things was the law, the last was Messiah, the son of David. And amongst these was repentance, because it is conducive to the happiness of the world. And our apostle had repentance in view, when he described our captivity, and desired it for us, as he said, "Before the mountains were brought forth thou didst turn man to contrition and say, Return, ye children of men." The meaning of this is: Before and after thou didst create the mountains, and form the earth and the world, thou wert from eternity to eternity, and then thou didst desire repentance when thou didst say, "Return, ye children of men," and if we repent, then thou answerest.

And that which necessitates our remaining in captivity is the fact that a thousand years, though many for us, are but few for thee. "For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday, which is passed." The explanation of this verse is as follows: Behold a thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday which has passed, or like a watch which is the third of the night. And when the period of the captivity is completed, we shall be as one who had slept one third of the night and then awoke. And in spite of its length, when its torrents have flowed and passed, it is as if it had never been. And so he said, זרמתם שנה יהי, "Thou carriest them away as in a torrent, they are as in a sleep." זרמתם is derived from זרם, which means torrent; and so the nations are compared to a torrent in the words, "As a torrent of hail, as a torrent of mighty waters overflowing" (Isaiah xxviii. 2), and it is said, "The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters" (Isaiah xvii. 13). The meaning of this last verse is that when the nations are united against Israel they rush upon them like mighty waters when they receive an addi

¹ *Pesachin*, 54a.

tional torrent. But in great tempests some regions often remain unscathed, the most weakly constructed building or the most fragile object will be saved, while walls will be overturned or stones carried away. In the same way captivity will crush and shatter powerful batteries and destroy strong walls, but God saves the weak and feeble nation, for the storm does not carry them away, and when the waves of the sea of captivity are agitated God calms them. If this were not so they would overwhelm us so that no trace of us would be left. Dost thou not see the abounding waters of the waves, black in colour, uplifted to their very height, advancing rapidly so that thou wouldst imagine that if they reached a ship they would sink and wreck it, or if they reached the dry land they would desolate it? Then thou seest one wave broken and multitudes follow continually, but still they are obedient to the command of God and do not pass the bounds he has assigned to them. Thus arise the mighty waves of distress in captivity, so that thou sayest, "None can now escape"; but at last thou seest how God stills them, and calms them, and delivers us from them; and thus spake David, "Which stilleth the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the tumult of peoples" (Psalm lxxv. 8). The explanation of this verse is as follows: O thou who stillest the tumult of the peoples when they rush over Israel. And when the period of the captivity is over, and when the waves have been poured forth and are arrested, it is as if it were the sleep of the slumberer in the words of the Apostle, "Thou carriest them away as with a torrent, they are as in a sleep."

"In the morning it flourisheth and groweth up" (Psalm xc. 6). The meaning of this verse is as follows. In the morning deliverance cometh after the night of captivity. He compares the darkness of captivity to the darkness of the night, and the morning of help to the dawn which brightening gradually, refresheth souls distressed by the anxieties of the night. He compares our position to that of a man who, like one who is blind, is lost in a desert, and the darkness of the night comes upon him, and he walks in dread of every possible calamity. Now he walks securely, now he is covered in darkness, now he has to be on his guard, for ditches are beneath him and precipices surround him. He knows not where he may fall, and if he be safe in his walking, then he is not secure from the injury of wild beasts which might seize him, or of the enemies lying in ambush for him on the road. Alas! in what sad straits is he, in what sore perplexity. The night drags on till the dawn ascends, till the light appears and men's minds are a little at rest, till the light bursts forth, and the sun is seen and light is given to the world, then the sorrow flies away, the eye of the traveller discerns the country around him, and he sees where to walk and whither he is going. David said,

referring to this, "Weeping may tarry for the night but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm xxx. 6); and also, "It shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth" (2 Sam. xxiii. 4); and with the light of the day of our deliverance the sun of our dynasty shall arise as Isaiah promised us, "Then shall thy light arise in darkness" (Isaiah lviii. 10); and another prophet says, "But unto you that fear my name, shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth and gambol as calves of the stall" (Malachi iii. 19). And when our light breaks forth the nations will covet our position and will come against us in the manner described by the prophet, "For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle" (Zechariah xiv. 2); and this is the war of Gog and Magog and their followers, which has been described by all the prophets. There is no prophet who has not foretold it.

But when they covet our position, and an opportunity presents itself to them of harming us, and we fear their attacks, God will bring their affair to naught, and they will be as if they had never been. God compares their position to that of a man who dreams that he has eaten and drunk and is satisfied, but when he awakes he is still hungry and thirsty. Thus are all the nations. They see that the city is surrounded by the peoples of the earth, desiring to swallow us, and we are besieged and the city is conquered and half of us are taken captive, and at that moment God grows angry and is enraged against all of them, as it is said, "My fury shall come up in my nostrils" (Ezekiel xxxviii. 18). And God will cause a great shaking through which the mountains shall be thrown down, and buildings and walls shall fall, and the wild beasts shall die through fright, even the fishes of the sea shall tremble and flee. And a voice shall come forth from God saying, "Your own swords shall pierce you," therefore will every one turn his sword against his neighbour, and heads and corpses shall fall, and the horses and their riders shall be annihilated, the rider struggles on, his eyes fail, his tongue cleaves to his mouth; he is seen but sees not; and so it is declared and explained by all the prophets. So the nations are as grass, the verdure of which just begins to be seen, and it is then dried up and withers. All which we have said is included in the one verse "In the morning they are like grass which groweth." In this very manner God foretold and said that the nations should be like unto grass; still not like the grass of the earth which has roots, branches and soil, moisture and other materials, which, although it is unstable, still has material and roots. But they shall be as the grass on the roof tops which has no roots to supply it, and no soil to nourish it, but it is blasted and immediately withers. So says the Psalmist, "They shall be as the grass on the roof tops," שְׁקִימָה שֶׁלֹּף יבֵּשׁ (Psalm cxxix. 6). The meaning of these last words is, "Before it is drawn forth from its covering it

withereth." Then Isaiah the prophet of God spoke in the same sense (Isaiah xl. 6-8). The meaning of these verses is thus, A voice came to me saying, "Cry," and I said "What shall I cry." The voice said "Cry that all mankind is in my sight as grass, and their works, and that which in their opinion is their excellence, is but as the flower of the field which will mature into no fruit or seed. At one moment it seems beautiful to you, but it has no permanence; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God and his promises stand for ever."

"On the high mountain" (Isaiah xl. 9). 'O thou prophecy, which bringest good tidings to Zion, upon a high mountain lift up thy voice with strength; O thou prophecy, that bringest good tidings to Jerusalem, raise thy voice, fear not, say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God."' And our apostle, referring to these matters, exclaims בְּקֶרֶךְ יַיִץ וְחֵלֶף. On the morrow this one will blossom and will produce new sprouts, but in the evening it will be annihilated and withered. And so will those be who arise in the morning to fight against us; God will darken their days as it is said, "A day of darkness and gloominess" (Zephaniah i. 15), and it is also said that it will be a day which is neither day nor night (Zechariah xiv. 7). "And darkness and gross darkness shall cover the earth" (Isaiah lx. 2), and they will fight against us, and there will be a great slaughtering amongst them from midday, and all of them shall perish, and at the approach of the evening the day shall brighten, as it is said "The Lord shall arise upon thee" (Isaiah lx. 2), and with respect to this, it is also said, "At the time of the evening there shall be light" (Zechariah xiv. 7), and at eventide not one of them will be left alive, as our first prophet said, "In the evening it shall be cut down and wither" (Psalm xc. 6).

And after the apostle finished describing the events which had taken place, which would take place, and that to which these events would lead, he again prophesies and laments over our condition in captivity when he says, "For we are consumed in thine anger" as thou hast threatened; and it is said "Ye shall be left few in number (Deut. iv. 27); and it is also said, describing our condition, "For we are left but a few of many" (Jeremiah xlii. 2), and there are many other such descriptions. So we are consumed in the anger of God, and we who are left are amazed in that we are cast into captivity in accordance with that which is said, "And we are consumed in thine anger." And the prophet describes that which necessitated this, "Behold all this is on account of our sins." When they multiply God places them before him, and looks at them, and according to their sins he punishes, as it is said, "Thine iniquity is marked before me" (Jeremiah ii. 22), and whatever we do secretly or openly is before his light. Naught is hidden from him, as it is said, "Can any hide himself in secret places that I

shall not see him" (Jeremiah xxiii. 24). Can any hide himself in secret places and rebel against me, so that I see him not; doth not my light fill my heavens and my earth. For I exist in every place, and no place is void of me, and that which will be is not hidden from me, and whither can one flee from me? And when God knew and saw he decided and pronounced sentence, thereby confirming in truth the description of our apostle, "Thou hast placed our iniquities before thee, our hidden sins before the light of thy countenance." "For all our days," etc. (Ps. xc. 9). Behold all our days vanish in the heat of thine anger, our years pass away like a word which is spoken. A word is spoken and is finished. And so in captivity it is said, "A son or daughter is born to such a one," and while the father hopes that the child will grow up, it dies; and we hear naught else than that a little child is dead as thou hast threatened, "Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but they shall not be thine" (Deut. xxviii. 41), and it is said, "Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them that there be none left" (Hosea ix. 12). But some will be excepted who will live, and in this manner our number decreases daily. And the prophet wept for this when he said "For we are consumed by thine anger." We desire perchance that deliverance may come in our days, though the lives of all of us vanish like a spoken word, and if some do live, how long do they live? The limit is seventy years, the extreme limit is eighty years. And so Moses said, "The days of our years are seventy years." Moses meant of our captivity; in short the sorrows of the heart, in addition to paucity of help, and want of strength, and cutting off of hope, make the heart sick, weaken our powers, shorten our lives, and bring death near, and we are all of us in this sad plight.

And those of us who exceptionally are in happier circumstances, gain naught except after great difficulties, and when we attain that which we strive for, means are found of taking it from us unjustly and with enmity. The prophet said, describing all this: "And their increase is but labour and sorrow," and even when we attain that which we strive for, it comes to us only with difficulty, because by attaining worldly goods man does not gain power over his own life, and even when we attain them, injustice will find causes for depriving us of them, as God decreed at the very first, "And I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured" (Deut. xxxi. 18), and it is also said *כי נז חיש ונעופה*, "For we are soon cut off and we fly away." *כי נז* Behold it shall be cut off quickly, and that which is in our possession shall fly away, for we have no endurance, no stability.

Then the prophet is again perplexed and amazed at the darkness of our captivity, which is distressing, which is obscure, which is severe, without any opportunity for Israel, and without any information as to its length, either from

useful analogy, or by means of correct calculation, or by means of clear proof, without good tidings, and without near hope. And we are perplexed, like a man who is sleeping in the middle of the sea, or on the top of a mast, and how can his sleep be comfortable when the roaring of the sea disturbs him? how can he be still when the water shakes that upon which he is lying? How can life be pleasant to him that is on the top of a mast, which is a very narrow and confined position, with the winds blowing vehemently, and terror and assured death beneath him? Such is the life of all of us in captivity. And Solomon said, "Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast" (Proverbs xxiii. 34). The Hebrew word **הבל** is a mast. And we are in this plight. And if the length of our captivity were determined, and we knew from what time the calculation began, there would be some relief for us. You see that the captivity of Egypt lasted four hundred years, but with respect to that captivity there is also doubt as to the date from which we are to begin the calculation. Is it from the covenant between the parts, or from the birth of Isaac, or from the hour when Israel went down into Egypt? God calculated it from the birth of Isaac to amount to four hundred years, and from the time of the covenant between the parts it amounts to about four hundred and thirty years, and had God desired to increase our captivity, it would have begun from the date of our entering Egypt. But God dealt gently with us, and left us in Egypt but two hundred and ten years, and then hinted at it in the words spoken to Jacob **רדו שמה** (Genesis xlii. 2), "Go down thither," for the number contained in the letters of the word **רדו** is two hundred and ten.¹ And as regards the captivity in Babylon, it is said to be seventy years, and this is subject to doubt. Is it to commence from the beginning of the Babylonian dynasty, or from the captivity itself? Between the two there is a difference of twelve years. The matter was obscure except to Daniel, who said, "There remains a little time before the dynasty of Elam shall be completed, then Media shall follow, and deliverance will be at hand,"² and this was so, and the seventy years were completed. But with regard to the present captivity, which is foretold to last many days, the apostle said until when, and the signs which were given to Daniel were obscure, and when he asked for an explanation, God said, "Go thy way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed till the time of the end" (Daniel xii. 9). When deliverance cometh, thou wilt understand all that God said in the Book of Daniel. And when Asaph perceived this great darkness, he wept, and said, "We see not our signs, there is

¹ *Seder Olam*, Cap. III. and parallels.

² The author seems in error in referring to Daniel. See Isaiah, Cap. xxi., Meguillah, 11b.

no more any prophet, neither is there among us any that knoweth how long" (Psalm lxxiv. 9). And when the best of mankind saw by means of the wonderful inspiration which was granted him, and by means of his magnificent powers the innermost meaning of things, but still was unable to comprehend the captivity, he exclaimed, "Who knoweth what will be the power of thine anger, and just in proportion as man should fear thee, so is thy anger?" And when we shall be sunk in the deep mire, do not cut us off entirely. The knowledge that our chastisement is fixed is enough for us, this is sufficient sorrow. Therefore do not deprive us of the light of thy law, and give us wisdom as a substitute for a prophet, who shall prophesy unto us, and supply us with a wise heart, whereby we may understand thy law, and be at rest in it. The apostle, summing up all these prayers, said, "Teach us to number our days" וְנִבֵּא לִבֵּב חִכְמָה, "and a heart of wisdom for a prophet."

And God so decreed it. The wisdom of our Rabbis and that knowledge to which each one of them attained are sufficient for thee, and the subjects they spoke about, and their books and their compositions are matters which we can understand through the study of many years only. I mean to say for instance that the Mishna and the commentary of the Talmud thereon, and the books of Midrashim are works which require a year or more in order to read even one of them; how much more time would be required to understand them? We can but employ ourselves for the rest of our lives with a few pages of their easiest works in accordance with the command of Moses וְנִבֵּא לִבֵּב חִכְמָה. Owing to that which has been read and taught in the days of our Rabbis in the days of captivity there is no less knowledge to be gained of the Torah now than in the days of the prophet himself.

"Return, O Lord, how long?" (verse 12). O God, when thy mercy is turned to us, it is enough. How long yet? In these words "how long" David implored for aid on behalf of Israel in captivity. "O Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph, having naught to perplex them, how long shall the workers of iniquity utter vain things and boast" (Psalm xciv. 3). God decreed that as a recompense for the night when we rebelled against him, the night of the spies, the night of the ninth of Ab, that we should implore for aid with the words "How long yet?" When God was angered against us and said, "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation" (Numbers xiv. 27) he determined to cast upon us the worst of calamities, on a similar night, the night of the ninth of Ab, and that we should be in sore distress and implore for deliverance from that distress with the words "how long yet?" And David made clear to us that we should use the words "how long yet" by repeating four times the words "how long" (Psalm xliii.) in correspondence with the similar expression

used four times by God "How long do you refuse?" (Exodus xvi. 28). "How long will this people provoke me?" (Numbers xiv. 11). "How long will they not believe in me?" (*ibid.*) "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation?" (Numbers xiv. 27), and by using the expression four times God showed that he would cast us into captivity and disperse us in four empires.

And when the thought of the long period of the captivity was too sad for Moses, he exclaimed "Return, O Lord, how long?" "Turn away thine anger from us" as if God were a man who repented on account of that which happened to a beloved one against whom God was angered, and so God promised us by the mouth of his apostle, "For the Lord shall judge his people and repent himself for his servants" (Deut. xxxii. 36), and Moses relying upon this promise prayed "And let it repent thee concerning thy servants."

"Satisfy us in the morning" (verse 14). O God, satisfy us in the morning of the dawn of our deliverance, and favour us with thy grace. For God is "abundant in mercy," and he favours us as he has promised, "With everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee" (Isaiah liv. 8). And it is also said, "How precious is thy lovingkindness, O God" (Psalm xxxvi. 8), and also, "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting" (Psalm ciii. 17). And it is also said of the Messiah, "And my mercy shall not depart from him" (2 Sam. vii. 15). And it is also said, "The sure mercies of David" (Isaiah lv. 3). Therefore the Apostle prayed, "Satisfy us in the morning with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days." And it is said, "Rejoice, ye righteous, in the Lord" (Psalm xxxiii. 1), and also, "Then our mouths shall be filled with laughter" (Psalm cxxvi. 2), and Isaiah said, "Break forth into joy, sing together" (Isaiah lii. 9). And a prophet said, "Sing with gladness for Jacob" (Jeremiah xxxi. 6). Therefore Moses exclaimed, "Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us" (verse 15). O God, cause us to rejoice in accordance with the days of our punishment. This the prophet sought from his Lord, and all men were ignorant, I mean the men of our own age and the men of preceding ages, as to the meaning of his request. It is impossible that Moses, our master, should pray that our days of joy should be in accordance with the number of our days of calamity. We do not find in preceding captivities this slight compensation, nor has God given any hints that he compensates in this slight measure. Job suffered in his body, in his wealth, in his children. No one maltreated him. He was not despised, or sold, or enslaved, and his punishment endured only twelve months,¹ and he was rewarded by receiving

¹ *Seder Olam* II.; *Mishna Edyot* II. 10.

twice as much as he had before in money and in children, and he lived a hundred and forty years. Since he received of all things twice as much as he had before, it seems as if he were seventy years of age at the time his trial began, therefore his whole life lasted two hundred and ten years. And as for us who have been slain, and taken captive and ruled over by our slaves, and our lives made miserable, and we and our children sold, and held in bondage eleven hundred years and more, not knowing how long that bondage will still continue, would our prophet who was filled with solicitude for us, and who stood so near to God as to reply to him when he said, "Michael should alone go with us" (there are the same letters in מִיכָאֵל and מְלָאכִי), "If thy countenance go not with us, bring us not up hence"—would he have prayed to his Master for so slight a compensation as that contained in the words, "Make us rejoice according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us." For if this prayer were granted, what would happen afterwards? Shall we again return to misfortune? No, for God has sworn, "For this is as the waters of Noah unto me" (Isaiah liv. 9), and he also said, "The Lord hath sworn by his right hand and the arm of his strength" (Isaiah lxii. 8).

The captivity in Egypt lasted two hundred and ten years, but of these years not many more than a hundred were spent in servitude, humiliation, and punishment. Yet the recompense for this was eight hundred and ninety years. And the captivity in Babylon lasted seventy years, and our happiness after that four hundred and twenty years, what then should recompense us for a captivity of eleven hundred years and more, perhaps hundreds of years more? How could Moses pray, "Make us rejoice according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us." He prayed to God to grant us days of happiness corresponding to days of misery, measured by such days as are days in God's sight. And God compared the period of our captivity to a moment, as it is said, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee" (Isaiah liv. 7). "In overflowing wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment" (Isaiah liv. 8). "Hide thyself for a little moment" (Isaiah xxvi. 20). "There is but a moment in his anger" (Psalm xxx. 6). All these verses are clear examples that the period of the captivity is a moment, and a moment is one part out of many hundred parts of an hour. So Moses prays to God to grant us hours and days, months and years, according to the length of the captivity in moments, so that for each moment there might be bestowed upon us a thousand years or more, and how many these will amount to God alone is able to tell. Thousands and myriads of years God will give us, for it was he who said a year will contain thousands and thousands of years, as it is written, "I will gather thee with great

mercies, and with everlasting mercy will I have compassion on thee" (Isaiah liv. 78). And it is also said, "To eternity and to eternity" (Daniel vii. 18), that is to say, a person who lives will live thousands of years, he will build buildings which will crumble to dust, while he exists, as the Prophet says, "And my chosen shall wear out the work of their hands" (Isaiah lxxv. 22).

And I am firmly persuaded that when Isaiah said "For as the days of a tree shall be the days of my people" (Isaiah lxxv. 22), he meant by tree the tree of life which was in the midst of the garden. God had given an assurance that every one who ate of the tree would live eternally, and God would not create anything in vain, and since Adam was driven forth from Paradise without eating the fruit, there is no doubt that it will be eaten at some future time, and the reason why the time seems delayed is that God does not wish that man should become thoroughly righteous till the end of time, as he himself has promised. "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah xi. 9), and it is also said "They shall all call upon the name of the Lord, and serve him with one consent" (Zephaniah iii. 9). Since it is proved that no created being, as the world is now, is created perfect, it follows that when the new heavens and the new earth are made, that the influences of the heavens and the nature of the earth will be totally changed, and that there will be a light which will eclipse the light of the sun and the moon, and then those of Israel who are worthy will eat of the tree of life, as it is said, "He will eat and live for ever." And this is the intention of that which David said of the Torah, "It is a tree of life to those who take hold of it" (Proverbs iii. 18). And he did not exaggerate, for the word of God is the exact truth; and if we had seen that any one who had studied the Torah had lived for ever, it would at once have been clear that God's word was truth, but since we have seen that Moses the master of all the prophets died, and do the prophets live for ever? (Zechariah i. 5), we ask where is the tree of life? But the words are meant here with reference to the distant future only, according to the words "Which if a man shall do, he shall live in them" (Ezekiel xx. 11) in the future, and therefore the author of the Targum, who knew the secrets of the word of God, translated the words "He shall live by them to all eternity," and David meant that for those who took hold of the Torah it would be a tree of life, and through it they would find favour in the sight of God, and through it they would become worthy to see the fulfilment of the divine promises, and merit to partake of the tree of life and live for ever. And the verse "Make us rejoice according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us," is an evident Biblical authority for all the assertions which have been made by those who explain the Scripture after the manner of a Midrash, including the verse in Daniel (xii. 3), "And they

that turn many to righteousness shall be as the stars for ever and ever."

And the prayer of Moses was answered. Moreover God made the following declaration by his prophets in answer to the prayer of Moses, "Let thy work appear unto thy servants openly and publicly." "They shall see eye to eye when the Lord returneth to him" (Isaiah lii. 8). "And ye shall see it, and your heart shall rejoice" (Isaiah lxvi. 14). "And your eyes shall see and ye shall say, The Lord be magnified" (Malachi i. 5). "And nations shall see thy righteousness and all kings thy glory" (Isaiah lxii. 2). And God, who is the most faithful of promisers, himself said, "And all the nations of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord" (Deut. xxviii. 10). And with respect to the words **והדרך על בניהם** they may be rendered thus, "Let thy beauty be upon the face of their children." It is to be noticed that the condition of a generation to whom deliverance came in their own days, was in no manner changed, except in respect to their bodily strength, their form and their bodies remained as they were heretofore, as it is said, "Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing." But with regard to the generation which shall grow up after the future deliverance, God will increase their stature, as it is said, **קוממיות** ¹ **ואורך אתכם קוממיות**. Our Rabbis explain this verse to mean double the stature which Adam had when he was driven forth from the Garden of Eden, that is to say, one hundred cubits. And God will strengthen their forms so that the strength of God will be apparent in their faces, as it is said "And their seed shall be known among the nations" (Isaiah lxi. 9). This is the meaning of the prayer of the prophet "May God and his favour be with us." And this also was the prayer for the accomplishment of which David strove all the days of his life, namely, that God might purify him to see the great good with which the souls of the pious are refreshed, and that through them he might attain the knowledge of the Law, when he said, "One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord," etc. (Psalm xxvii. 4). So we should read and pray that we may be purified to see the light of God, and to hasten to his temple early in the morning. Here **לבקר** in this verse means to visit early in the morning, being derived from **בקר** morning, not from the word which means "to distinguish, to search" as it is used in the verse, "He shall not search, whether it shall be good or bad" (Leviticus xxvii. 33). Therefore God assured him, and announced to him the good tidings that he should live and return to the House of God continually and for many years, and so David said joyfully, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (Psalm xxiii. 6).

¹ *Sanhedrin*, 100a.

I shall not be missing at the house of God during the whole of my life, and I shall sit again and again in the house of God, to the utmost length of days, that is to say days without number. The Hebrew word *ושבתי* means, "And I shall return." And it occurs twice in Scripture in this sense, namely *ושבתי בשלום* "And I shall return in peace" (Genesis xxviii. 21), and in the verse we are now considering. And David means to say that he will live in this world during his natural life, having enjoyed the goodness of God and his favours, that he will then pass from it to the next world, and that then again he will return to the House of God at the resurrection, dwelling in it and visiting it early in the morning to the utmost length of time (Psalm xxiii. 6). "O Lord, to the utmost length of time" (Psalm xciii. 5). And the pious men of Israel will live in the House of God to the utmost length of days, and in like manner God promised those who read his book, "Length of days and years of life and peace, they shall add unto thee" (Proverbs iii. 2).

"And establish thou the work of our hands upon us." In this world. Because if the help of God is granted to the pious he improves his work in obedience to him. For if man inclines to obedience God and his angels will assist him, and if he turns to evil, God permits evil to come to him, and will not turn him from it,¹ and if God is pleased with his servants, he assists them in doing good. And if man does one good action God causes that action to bring forth for him many rewards which he did not expect, and if perchance the *יצר הרע* should once overcome him, God will make difficult for him the opportunities of rebelling against him, and he will defend him against it, and he will deliver him just as he delivered Joseph, and Boaz, and Paltiel ben Laish, and many others like them. It was in this sense that the prophet prayed and said, "Establish thou the work of our hands upon us" that we may be proved worthy to receive the promise contained in the words, "He has established the work of our hands upon us." God has guaranteed to us that when he shall be pleased with us after the redemption he will correct our manners, establish our religion, and direct us in obeying the law, as it is said, "I shall put my spirit among you" (Ezekiel xxxvi. 27), and with regard to the knowledge of the law, God guarantees "I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their hearts I will write it" (Jeremiah xxxi. 32, 33). In these verses God says, "I will put my Torah in the heart of each one of them, and it shall be written in their hearts so that no one will teach his neighbour how God is to be worshipped, but they shall all know me, from the least of them even unto the greatest," and this is what our great prophet prayed for on our behalf before his death. And when we say his "death" we must not liken it to the death of other mortal men. His corpse remained

¹ Josua xxxviii.b.

pure even in death. His eye did not grow dim, and its moisture did not abate. He was as if he were in a sleep, for God appeared to him as usual. The light of God kissed the pure mouth with which he had so often been addressed and the pure words of which he made binding even upon himself. He thereby made our prophet a light to teach us his words. His spirit was taken from him in such a manner as God willed, not as the spirit is taken from the bodies of other men, but without the bitterness of death, and it was at once united with the angels, and clothed with the body of angels like Michael and Gabriel, and he in his turn sang praises and thanksgiving to God even as they did. And even when he was amongst the angels his power was not less than theirs. It was not less when he was clothed in bodily form, surely it was not less when he was clothed in the form of angels. This too is what our Rabbis say who realised the mission of Moses, and how correct was their opinion when they said, "There are some who say that Moses our master is not dead but standeth and serveth God in heaven."¹ And this too is our opinion. And after he presented his intercession on our behalf he recited his blessings, and when he finished them, he said farewell to Israel and ascended heavenwards, and his Creator hid him till a time shall come when he shall be pleased with this world,² and then he will send him back to it, to assist the king who is to reign in the strength of God, that beloved one of God to whom testimony is borne in the verse "Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee" (Psalm ii. 7). And this intercession has smoothed for us all the rugged ways of captivity, and it is the strong fortress in which we can take refuge in the time of misfortune until the time shall come which God has appointed for our deliverance, for the fulfilment of his promises to us.

Therefore reflect upon our letter, and what it teaches. May thy faith be perfected. May thy knowledge be corrected. The fundamental truths which we have placed before thee are sufficient for thee to rely upon. Reflect, then, upon what they demand of thee, so that thou mayest become righteous in the sight of thy Creator. It is necessary that this prayer which I have commented upon should be treasured up by thee, and that thou shouldst read it before *ברוך שמו*, seeking a blessing for thyself in its pure words, and uniting thyself to God by means of the prayer which was offered up by the best of men and the greatest of prophets, and there is no prayer better than it. And if men had only known its contents, and the fundamental truths which God has established in it for the strengthening of our religion and the correcting of our faith, they would have made it obligatory upon themselves every day, just as they did

¹ *Sotah*, 26b.

² See *Targum*, Jerushalmi, to Song of Moses, MS. (British Museum), additional 18,690, p. 219a.

the reading of the Shema. I have therefore briefly made clear to you its contents, so that you may be guided in that which I have pointed out to you, and that you may imitate that which I have made clear to you, and may God guide all of us to understand its contents and to know his wishes ; and may he cause his redemption to draw near in our days, and establish in our time that which he has promised us, and may he enlighten our darkness as he has assured us, and his assurance is indeed faithful. "The Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee" (Isaiah lx. 2). And so may it be God's will.

This was written by Emanuel, the son of Rabbi Yechiel נבתיא.¹

¹ "His soul shall dwell at ease, and his seed shall inherit the land" (Psalm xxv. 14).
